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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001474

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SA](#) [KU](#) [AE](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA VS. UAE: KUWAIT THE REFEREE?

REF: A. RIYADH 1156
[1](#)B. RIYADH 1339
[1](#)C. ABU DHABI 981

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Saudi officials have continually downplayed reports of Saudi-UAE friction (ref C) during the last several months, characterizing it as a "light problem" (ref B) that will be "fixed in the near future" (ref A). While post's GCC contacts remain generally tight-lipped, the Kuwaitis have told us that rising tensions are "a major issue" and claim to be playing an active role in mediating the dispute. END SUMMARY.

SAUDI-UAE TENSIONS A "MAJOR ISSUE"

[1](#)2. (C) In a conversation with Poloff on November 3, Kuwaiti First Secretary Adel Al-Ghenaiman (protect) said that Kuwait viewed deteriorating Saudi-UAE relations as a "major issue" and added that the Kuwaiti government was actively involved in mediating the dispute. Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah had focused on this topic during his October 6 meeting with Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, he continued, and had encouraged the UAE to take a more moderate stance. Following that meeting, Al-Nahyan had delivered a response to Al-Sabah and asked that it be delivered to King Abdullah. The Kuwaiti Ambassador to Riyadh was expected to deliver this response to King Abdullah on the evening of November 3. While Ghenaiman did not know the exact contents of the note, he believed the two sides were moving closer together and thought an "understanding" could be reached prior to the GCC's planned December summit in Kuwait.

GCC UNITY TRUMPS THE BLAME GAME

[1](#)3. (C) From Ghenaiman's perspective, the Saudis and the Emiratis shared the blame. However, GCC unity had to take priority over bilateral disputes and a moderation of the UAE position was the most practical solution. The Saudis, he observed, were being "greedy" to insist upon the terms of the 1974 agreement. The Saudis called the smaller GCC states their "brothers," he continued, but clearly considered themselves first among equals. This was a continuous source of tension, which different GCC countries dealt with in different ways. Nevertheless, the UAE had gone "too far" by challenging the validity of the 1974 treaty in an overt and confrontational way. There may be issues with the treaty, Ghenaiman conceded, but it was supposed to be a treaty between states and not individuals. The Emiratis refusal to honor it following a change in leadership was unsettling, and cast their general trustworthiness in doubt.

NAYIF'S 2005 VISIT: WHERE IT ALL BEGAN?

14. (C) Ghenaiman identified Prince Nayif's 2005 visit to Abu Dhabi as the real beginning of the current problem. Prince Nayif had traveled to Abu Dhabi with the intention of discussing and resolving the border dispute, Ghenaiman said, but the Emiratis had treated the visit as a courtesy call and refused to get down to business. A frustrated Nayif supposedly then raised the issue directly, but the Emiratis would still not engage. Nayif remained the SAG's lead on the issue, and the Kuwaiti Ambassador had met with him twice in recent months to advocate for an amicable resolution. However, Nayif was currently out of the country.

COMMENT

15. (C) Given the tight-lipped nature of most of our diplomatic contacts from GCC countries, Ghenaiman's candor is refreshing. However, his analysis of Saudi and Emirati behavior may reflect his own opinions rather than the party line. His description of how Nayif viewed the 2005 visit to Abu Dhabi, based on recent conversations between Nayif and the Kuwaiti Ambassador, is inconsistent with Emirati reports suggesting Nayif was the one who was unwilling to budge. However, it suggests misunderstanding and personal distrust are at the heart of the matter. Kuwait's attempts at mediation are an acknowledgement of the growing seriousness of the problem. END COMMENT.

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